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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 001724

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STATE FOR SCA/FO DAS GASTRIGHT, SCA/A, S/CRS, SA/PB, S/CT,
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STATE PASS TO USAID FOR AID/ANE, AID/DCHA/DG
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2016

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [AF](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: STEPPED UP IRANIAN INFLUENCE REACHES FOREIGN
MINISTRY

REF: A. KABUL 1327

- [B.](#) KABUL 1605
- [C.](#) KABUL 1594
- [D.](#) KABUL 1370
- [E.](#) KABUL 606
- [F.](#) KABUL 1167
- [G.](#) KABUL 829
- [H.](#) KABUL 1031
- [I.](#) KABUL 1198

Classified By: A/DCM Carol Rodley for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

[¶](#)1. (S) Over the past several months, Iran has taken a series of steps to expand and deepen its influence in Afghanistan. Afghan contacts point to the creation of the National Front and the National Unity Council, the discovery of Iranian weapons in Afghanistan, Iran's control of media outlets and its growing cultural influence, and alleged direct financial support to members of Parliament as troubling evidence. During May 15 meeting with PolCouns, ForMin Spanta's Senior Policy Advisor Davood Moradian accused Iranian agents of orchestrating Parliament's recent effort to oust the Foreign Minister. According to Moradian (whose tenure at the MFA is tied to Spanta's), Spanta is one of several moderate secular reformers Iran has targeted for removal. While Moradian alleged Iran paid USD 4 million to 80-90 members of Parliament for their support, MPs we talk to claim they were motivated by other factors, including Spanta's refusal to give up his German passport and poor performance on the issue of Afghans deported from Iran. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Safari visited Kabul on May 14 to protest Spanta's remarks criticizing Iran to Parliament. One positive outcome of his visit was an agreement to send a GOA delegation to Tehran to discuss a more orderly return of Afghan refugees from Iran. END
SUMMARY

Iran Orchestrated Parliamentary Vote

¶2. (S) FM Spanta's Senior Advisor Moradian asserted to Political Counselor on May 15 (and repeated May 22) that Iranian intelligence was behind the events to oust Spanta. "They orchestrated everything; Spanta was the clear target, this was an attempted Iranian coup". Moradian claimed that Iran's efforts to undermine Spanta and other secular moderates stemmed from the formation of the United Front and the GOA's reaction to it which Iran did not like. Spanta (who is from Herat) had been invited to join the United Front but declined. He was asked again to join during his recent visit to Tehran.

¶3. (S) Moradian offered the following explanation for Iranian actions against the MFA: Iran sees the MFA moving toward becoming a more independent Ministry able to choose its own allies, and Spanta's closeness to the U.S., EU, and the Saudis makes Iran uncomfortable. It sees an independent Afghan foreign policy as a threat. Spanta is one of the few remaining secular GOA officials in the Cabinet, and his departure would help Iran move the GOA in a more conservative direction. Spanta is a democratizing factor that threatens Iran's interests. The coup was well-prepared, not a spontaneous event. According to Moradian, Iran had even prepared the letters summoning Spanta to Parliament. Moradian also alleged that Iran had prepared a movie depicting the MFA's incompetence in handling the issue of the Afghans deported from Iran, but that the film could not be shown during the Parliamentary debates due to technical

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difficulties.

¶4. (S) Moradian argued that Spanta was targeted for his principles and values which are anathema to Iran. He said countries that support those values should support the Foreign Minister for the following reasons: Spanta has resisted Iranian calls for a security treaty; he has refused to sell out Afghan water rights to Iran; he has pushed for an independent media; and he supports human rights and transitional justice. Moradian described the U.S. and EU as "very lonely" in Afghanistan as few other countries or Afghans support such principles.

¶5. (S) Moradian claimed that 80-90 MPs have received money from Iran, adding that 40-50 voted against Spanta for other reasons. In total, Iranian agents have paid MPs over USD 4 million for support, he asserted. He said that Iran had been prepared to dole out more money to its supporters if Spanta was actually removed from office. Many of our contacts among MPs say they deeply resent Spanta's allegations that they are somehow linked to Iran. They point to his condescending attitude, his refusal to inform Parliament, his refusal to give up his German citizenship, and his argument that refugees are not part of the MFA's mandate as factors that turned Parliament against him.

¶6. (S) Evidence of Iranian influence peddling go beyond the Spanta no-confidence vote. Afghan Youth Party leader Sayed Jawed Husseini (a Shiite who does not support Iran) claimed to Deputy PolCouns May 15 that, when he worked with Qanooni, he learned that Qanooni received USD250,000 monthly from Iran which he used to influence MPs' votes. Moradian said that Iranian FM Mottaki even tried to bribe Spanta during his visit to Kabul in December. He presented Spanta a package which the ForMin assumed contained a book. When Spanta later opened it and found USD 50,000 in bills, Moradian said the ForMin immediately turned the money over to the Ministry of Finance to be used for MFA expenditures. On May 21, the MFA's DG for UN Affairs, Ayoob Erfani, separately conveyed to PolMilOff a similar account of the Iranian FM's attempt to pass money to Spanta.

Iranian Deputy FM's Unscheduled Visit to Complain

¶7. (S) Moradian explained that Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Safari's May 14 visit to Kabul was for one purpose only -- to protest Spanta's remarks in Parliament critical of Iran. The visit was unscheduled, and Spanta had at first refused to meet with him. After President Karzai met with Safari, Spanta reluctantly agreed to a meeting. According to Mooradian, the meeting was tense and Safari denied any Iranian role in Parliament's no-confidence vote.

¶8. (SBU) One positive outcome of the meeting was an Iranian invitation to GOA officials to visit Tehran the week of May 21 to discuss possible joint efforts to facilitate the orderly return of Afghan refugees.

Stepped Up Iranian Efforts

¶9. (S) Iranian involvement in the efforts to remove Foreign Minister Spanta are just the latest in a series of moves over the past several months to expand and deepen Iranian leverage on the Afghan political process. Moradian and other contacts -- including Information and Culture Minister Khurram, the MFA DG for UN Affairs, and Afghan Youth Party leader Husseini -- point to Iranian direct and indirect involvement in the creation of the National Front (which Moradian claims Iran does not deny) and the National Unity

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Council. They also highlight the discovery of Iranian weapons in Afghanistan. President Karzai has expressed to visiting Members of Congress his concerns over Iranian agents engaging Taliban and supplying them with weapons.

¶10. (S) Softer sides of Iranian "meddling" include Iran's control of media outlets (which will become that much easier if the version of the media law passed May 22 allowing foreign investment is signed by President Karzai) and its growing cultural influence. These, coupled with alleged direct Iranian financial support to members of Parliament, are all deeply troubling signs.

¶11. (S) Spanta's Senior Policy Advisor reiterated on May 22 the MFA's interest in direct discussions between the Secretary and Spanta on how to respond to Iran's growing

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influence in Afghanistan.

Comment

¶12. (S) Moradian is a close confidant of the Foreign Minister and would leave the MFA to return to a professorship at St. Andrews in Scotland if Spanta loses his job. Like his boss, far more Westernized and reformist than most Afghans, even within the government, Moradian expresses exasperation and continued determination to use the Foreign Ministry "to build a bridge to the West" and to serve as an example of reform in Afghanistan.

WOOD